

# BFTF at Wake Forest University, 2013

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Not many people have the chance to travel to the United States at this age, so when I found out that I am one of the two fellows representing Hungary during the Benjamin Franklin Summer Institute, firstly I did not even know how to react – it was just unbelievable. Anna Kerékgyártó, my former schoolmate was the other fellow, and our journey began on June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Five a.m. Two tired but also excited students meet at the airport, and depart to Frankfurt. By the time we get there, we already know that our flight to Washington has been delayed. Despite the not very promising start we quickly accommodate ourselves and sleep in shifts on the seats in front of the gates. As we find out our gate number, we go there and meet a lot, repeat, a lot of people coming with the same purpose. We quickly introduce ourselves and start forming little groups, talking about current affairs, each other's interests, and about the program and the United States itself. After about a 3 hour delay, our flight leaves Frankfurt and in less than 8 hours, we are already at Washington Dulles, where we split up depending on whether we go to Wake Forest or Purdue University. Unfortunately, a few of us, including me, have missed our connections, so we are taking the 11 pm plane, which is also delayed, so more than 24 hours after leaving Budapest we finally land in Greensboro. My host family, who took care of me from 12-22<sup>nd</sup> July picks me and two other students up, and we drive to the campus.



**The first jetlag experience for most of us**

Which is indeed very dark at 2 am, so we decide to sleep and explore the University in the morning.

## Week #1

*Getting to know each other, courses...*



**We rewrote the Bill of Rights!**

The first week mainly consisted of courses led by university professors in the morning and the afternoon, and then some social fun time in the evening. My first course was Citizenship and Conflict, which I really enjoyed as I did not just learn about participative citizenship and conflict management but also got a lot of reading suggestions and took part in a simulation where we represented an authoritarian government negotiating with others. In the evening we went on a scavenger hunt

around the campus, which seemed pretty big, but as a few days passed, we got used to it and knew every single building – especially Starbucks and the “Pit”, our usual dining place.

The second course we took was Comparative Constitutionalism, where we studied about the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution, and also had a debate on whether the US Constitution should be a role model for emerging democracies, which we won on the negative side. We had an international dinner of July 3<sup>rd</sup> where everyone cooked their national dishes and next day we celebrated 4<sup>th</sup> of July together in the garden in front of our apartment buildings. The last course we took was Social Entrepreneurship, where we have started working on our own projects.

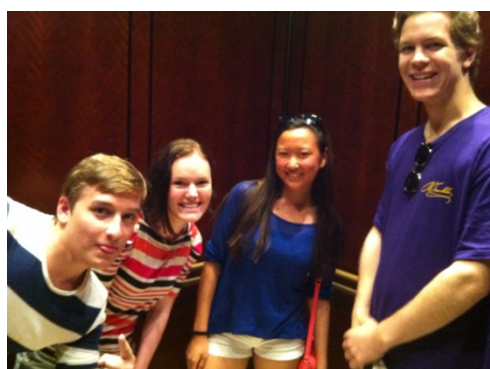


I'm cooking. Or at least I've tried:D

## Week #2

### *Philly, D.C...*

After taking the courses we got on a bus and headed off to Philadelphia. There we visited a Museum of Benjamin Franklin's Press, the Independence Hall, we also had the chance to see the Liberty Bell, and Elfreth's Alley, the Nation's oldest residential street. We also enjoyed wandering around in Philadelphia as it was astonishing to see the oldest American cathedrals right next to skyscrapers. But to me, the favorite part of the trip started when we went to Washington, D.C. We spent every single day there with visiting attractions, museums, memorials, etc. but have not even seen half of what we wanted. We have been to the Congress together, and later on five of us also got into the Senate, which was one of the most memorable experiences – a real taste of politics. We have also visited the Holocaust Museum and the Newseum, the Lincoln Memorial, the National Archives, and of course, Georgetown area with its well-known university. In Washington I felt a bit like home – the city structure is somehow similar to Budapest's. :) We also visited the State Department and participated in a NATO simulation, where I was the spokesman for the United Kingdom, trying to agree on a minimum rate of military spending/GDP with Albania, Germany, and the



In the elevator to the Senate

United States. We had a few lectures by leaders of DC Central Kitchen and Opower, two organizations which both have a strong focus on social impact.

### **Week #3**

#### *Family stay, community work...*

After coming back from Washington, we went with James, the UK fellow to David and Sally Harman to live with them for the next 10 days, and all I can say is that those 10 days thanks to them have made a really good impression of the American lifestyle on me. We have been to a baseball match, a Nascar Museum, Irish and Scottish pubs, Bowling, and many other things,



David and Sally took us to the USS Battleship North Carolina in Wilmington, NC

we even went to the Atlantic Ocean! Meanwhile we also went to the university to visit lectures and workshops led by our mentors, do community work, and work on our projects. We also had a course on the role of documentaries in today's society, which – even though I'm not a film guy – I think was one of the best parts of that week. We also had the chance to take part in faculty lunches, where we met professors from all around the University, and had the chance to talk about their field of expertise.

### **Week #4**

#### *Presentations, homecoming...*

In the last week we continued faculty lunches and focused on preparing presentations of our projects. I've had lunch with professors teaching Economics, Philosophy, International Relations, Computer Science, and even the University's debate coach. We had the chance to ask questions on particular topics, but it also helped me a lot in deciding about what I want to study at university.



Farewell dinner – one of our last nights at Wake Forest University



As for the project, I am working on a social educational website, which I already started developing. We spent the last night of the program with writing goodbye letters and planning our reunion next year, which will hopefully take place in my extremely patriotic roommate's, Jacob's motherland, Malta.

*To conclude...*

All in all, BFTF was a very enjoyable and memorable experience. I feel that these four weeks have not just been an academic, or cultural experience, but beyond that, have also had a strong mindset effect – BFTF just makes you think bigger, on a different level. And hopefully not just think, but do bigger, as many of us have started working on very ambitious projects which will be implemented on various scales from the local community to a global level.

*Miklós Hajnal*

